
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District: **Anacostia Historic District** (x) Agenda
Address: **1409 V Street SE**

Meeting Date: **January 28, 2016** (x) Additions
Case Number: **15-577** (x) Subdivision

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Revised concept

The applicant, FDP Acquisitions (FD Stonewater LLC), agent for the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Washington, the property owner (and with Shinberg Levinas Architectural Design), requests the Board's review of a concept to construct classroom and gym wings flanking the 1909 Saint Theresa's school, plus site work. The expanded building would become a charter elementary school. The project would retain nearly the entire historic school. It would also subdivide the present lot, so as to separate out the two-story house at 1401 V Street, built as a convent in 1950, and take a portion of its present assessment and taxation lot.

This is the Board's third review of the project. At the December hearing, the Board unanimously supported the subdivision and the size, massing and location of the wings, as well as the rooftop mechanical equipment, the location of the parking lot, and the retention of the berm and the historic entrance and entry sequence.

The Board also generally supported the staff report comments (see December staff report, attached) and suggested revisions of the elevations of the wings to:

- (1) make the colors more subdued relative to that of the existing school;
- (2) provide more rhythm to the classroom windows;
- (3) improve the proportional relationship between the classroom wing and main block;
- (4) eliminate hyphens or reveals at the juncture of the wings with the main block;
- (5) add more solidity to the ground floor of the classroom wing;
- (6) provide more texture and a smaller module to the siding material of the wings;
- (7) provide ADA access at the entry from the parking lot; and
- (8) provide sensitive site lighting and landscaping.

It had also been recommended that the applicant provide some kind of preservation plan to discuss the treatment of the existing elements of the historic building. This has been done and, among other things, it recommends retention of the school's windows.

Evaluation

Materials: The colors of the wings have been revised to reduce contrast with the existing building. The primary cladding material is now brick, the principal material of most purpose-built institutional buildings in the historic district.

The rear elevation is to be clad with EIFS, a material the Board discourages. That cladding is given some relief with some plane change and joints.

Organization of elevations: Where the wings meet the main block there are no longer hyphens, but there are windows that perform a similar function. Each wing would be cleaner without them, that is, having instead more solid ends, with the remaining windows balanced symmetrically on the wings' center lines.

The fenestration of the classroom wing has been revised, giving it more rhythm and a better proportional relationship to the main block. The windows don't have precisely the same proportions as those in the existing school, but they are grouped similarly. This level of literal borrowing may not be necessary, but it is not incompatible.¹ Under the circumstances, a more literal borrowing—using double-hung windows—would provide a little more texture to the wing, and a more practical means of operability.

The extension of the parking beyond the interior of the classroom wing doesn't allow the façade to come to the ground, and that hurts the appearance of the first floor and emphasizes the wing's length and horizontality. This has been counteracted to a degree by vertical brick patterning and a slight recess of the window bays. These features also help define the piers or sections of wall between the three classroom bays, again emphasizing verticality and subtly dividing the façade into three pieces. It would be better if the center bay were a bit wider than the others, providing some degree of hierarchy that relates back to the division of the school façade.

The wings could use more visual interest. In the last version, that was to be provided through the bold colors of the proposed siding. But even with the relief now added, the wings are pretty plain boxes. Each could use some kind of upper termination, for instance, not an elaborate cornice, but some sort of coping or corbelling.

Site features: The long ramp has been eliminated from the front of the gym, and a new ADA access from the street has been provided at the east end of the classroom wing. With the project still conceptual, the site lighting has not yet been developed.

A fence still bounds the recreation area in front of the gym. While a tall fence in front of the building remains a concern, its height has been reduced from eight to six feet. Even the fence in front of the old school probably need not be 48 inches tall, but only 42.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept, but that it discuss the issues raised above toward further development of the design before delegating review to staff.

¹ At the last hearing, the staff had raised concerns about the last iteration's ribbon windows and had recommended more emphasis on the divisions between windows, but not necessarily that they each be punched openings.

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District: **Anacostia Historic District** (x) Agenda
Address: **1409 V Street SE**

Meeting Date: **September 24, 2015** (x) Additions
Case Number: **15-577** (x) Subdivision

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée** (x) Revised concept

The applicant, FDP Acquisitions (FD Stonewater LLC), agent for the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Washington, the property owner, requests the Board's review of a concept to construct wings flanking the former Saint Theresa's school and additional site work. The expanded building would become a charter elementary school.

The three-story brick school was designed by Julius Wenig and erected by the Cassidy Company in 1909. A school for all its working life, it has been vacant for several years.

The east wing would serve as a gymnasium. The west wing would be a three-story classroom wing and shelter some parking.

The project would subdivide the present lot, so as to separate out the two-story house at 1401 V Street, built as a convent in 1950. The drawings suggest that the subdivision would detach a portion of the convent lot for the sake of enlarging the school site.

The two large wings would be constructed on what is now largely paved parking and playground space, occupying most of the lot, but retaining a small rear yard and putting a play area in the front yard. There would be a service drive off the ten-foot-wide alley at rear and a curb cut for access to a parking area at the west end of the property's frontage.

The project would retain nearly the entire historic school, with less demolition than shown in October. At that hearing, the Board unanimously supported the subdivision and the general outlines of the project, i.e., flanking wings, but did not approve the concept, requesting revisions suggested in the staff report and recognizing that much greater detail (including rear elevations and proposed rooftop mechanical) will be necessary before the concept can be approved. The Board was particularly concerned about the size and massing of the wings, their height equal to the historic school, and the imposing nature of the whole as it faces surrounding homes. It was suggested that the applicant need not attempt a wholly symmetrical composition but could step down, especially on the west end of the site, to take advantage of the lower grade both to lower the overall height and provide a more natural main entrance at grade. The Board encouraged changes in the height and/or plane of the hyphens as they relate to the school's existing stair towers. The Board discouraged creating a berm on that end of the site and requested more study of the program, of the historic evolution of the site, and of the proposal to strip the paint from the historic building.

Evaluation

As a response, the layout has been revised dramatically, intended now to house a conventional elementary school program. The east parking garage was eliminated and the west wing has been sunk to about the present sidewalk grade. The east wing is now the equivalent of two stories but would accommodate a gym (the school's old gym/cafeteria/auditorium would remain a cafeteria). Both wings are lower than the main block and have been set back behind the school's side stair additions, making the original school stand out. The shrinking of the wings also provides more room at the rear of the property for service and recreation, although we do not yet have the details on how those spaces would be treated. These are all positive developments.

The changes do raise several issues, however:

- The parking garage is no longer underground nor wholly beneath the building. A parking lot would be located on the former playground space, partly behind the present (but reconstructed) berm and continuing under the front portion of the new classroom wing. An open lot and garage bays, even screened by a berm, are far from ideal, but it could be argued that a parking lot is no worse than the present paved playground or the parking lot on the east.
- The proposed ADA access to the building is via a long ramp cut through the berm at the east end of the property, neither very visible nor convenient. It also requires the construction of long retaining walls and might feel unsafe, lacking good sightlines. While such an entrance may serve the separate use of the gym for after-hours public functions, it does not appear optimal for the school in general. An entrance straight from the street, similar to that proposed in October for a main entrance, would be more successful, but it could be of a more modest size if the main entrance remains open. The pedestrian entrance shown from the parking lot to the new classroom wing suggests one such approach; there might even be another such entrance on the opposite end of the main block. While there is value to keeping the historic entrance functional, it is difficult to imagine that no occupants of the building will seek alternatives to the front stairs.
- With the setback of the wings, the principal recreation space is now proposed to be in front of the gym, which has a certain logic. But the enclosure of that space is far from ideal as, unlike the rest of the front yard, this area would be bounded by an eight-foot-tall fence.

The particulars of the architectural design raise some concerns as well:

- According to the architect, the applicant does not intend to strip the paint from the brick school. Despite the setback of the wings, their brightly colored panels are likely to stand out relative to a fairly blank main block. Using brick as the primary wall material would be a more compatible approach, as all the purpose-built institutional and commercial buildings in the historic district were constructed of masonry.
- Depending on the option selected or how it is ultimately detailed, the window openings in the wings appear overscaled relative to those of the historic school.
- The classroom wing is wider or longer than the school itself, considerably more so than the school's central pavilion. And the recess of the wing's basement level emphasizes the structure's horizontality, an effect that is only slightly relieved by continuing that recess vertically where the wing meets the old school. The wing could use some device to break up its façade and introduce some balancing verticality, but the recess of the basement level fights that.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board support the size and location of the wings, but that it request that the applicant refine the project to address the issues discussed above.